

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 026

JC 930 223

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 TITLE A Survey of the Community's Information and Attitudes about Dona Ana Branch Community College. A Research Report.
 INSTITUTION New Mexico State Univ., Las Cruces. Dona Ana Branch Community Coll.
 PUB DATE Apr 93
 NOTE 20p.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS College Outcomes Assessment; *Community Attitudes; Community Colleges; Community Surveys; Comparative Analysis; Institutional Evaluation; Knowledge Level; Participant Satisfaction; Questionnaires; *School Community Relationship; Self Evaluation (Groups); Two Year Colleges
 IDENTIFIERS New Mexico (Dona Ana County); *New Mexico State University Dona Ana Branch

ABSTRACT

In 1992, Dona Ana Branch Community College (DABCC) in Las Cruces, New Mexico, conducted a telephone survey of a random sample of Dona Ana County residents to examine community attitudes towards the college. In particular, the study examined barriers to student access; the reputation and visibility of DABCC; community awareness of programs, courses, and delivery formats; community perceptions of the quality of instruction; and community understanding and support of the college. A total of 167 calls were completed with usable responses to at least some of the survey questions. Where possible, results were compared with findings from a similar survey conducted in 1990. Study findings included the following: (1) 88% of the respondents were aware of DABCC, an increase of 10% from 1990; (2) 81% were aware of occupational training courses, while 58% were aware of student services; (3) significantly more males than females were aware of adult basic education, evening and weekend scheduling, satellite campus classes, availability of financial aid, and student support services; (4) 31% of the respondents or their relatives had taken courses at DABCC, and 96% of them described the quality of instruction as excellent or good; (5) significantly more respondents over 59 years of age believed that continuing to offer community education courses was important; and (6) the greatest impediments to taking classes were lack of time among 26 to 40 year-olds, and lack of money among 18 to 25 year olds. Recommendations, 14 data tables/figures, and the survey instrument are included. (PAA)

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DOÑA ANA BRANCH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A SURVEY OF THE COMMUNITY'S INFORMATION AND ATTITUDES ABOUT DOÑA ANA BRANCH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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JL930223

Executive Summary

A survey of Doña Ana County residents in Summer 1992 was undertaken as part of the DABCC Outcomes Assessment. The survey was conducted in order to measure the following indicators of community college outcomes: the Community College's reputation and visibility; understanding and support of the college; perceptions of the quality of instruction; awareness of programs, courses, and delivery formats; and barriers to student access. The results of this survey also offered information on trends, since a similar telephone survey of the community had been undertaken in Spring 1990. A telephone survey resulted in 167 contacts.

A notable conclusion of the study is that the community is becoming significantly more aware of the Community College, and that this awareness carries affirmative tones. Community awareness of DABCC increased by 10 percent (from 78 percent to 88 percent) between 1990 and 1992. Also, an increase was noted in the percentage of the population who had taken courses at DABCC and their perception of the quality of education they had received.

Survey findings pointed out some perceived barriers to access to higher education at the Community College. Lack of time was mentioned most frequently, and money considerations next, as reasons survey respondents were not taking DABCC classes.

The analysis of the survey results some relationships between the gender, ethnicity, or age of the respondents and their perceptions. Males were found to be significantly more aware than females of these aspects of the Community College: adult basic education, evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes, availability of financial aid, and student support services. The 60-years and older age group were less aware than others of adult basic education and evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes, but this group believed that community education courses were important more strongly than other age groups.

The 26–40 age group cited lack of time as an impediment to taking classes more often than other age groups; the 18–25 year olds indicated money considerations as a barrier more than other ages. Hispanics, more than Anglos, reported money considerations as an impediment to their taking classes. Women, more than men, said that transportation difficulties and dependent care responsibilities were barriers to their taking DABCC classes.

The recommendations for action resulting from this study include:

- Improve awareness of the Community College by increasing awareness of occupational education credit programs, student support services, and evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes.
- Offer courses in a short or modular format at convenient times and locations and target market them to the 26—40 year old segment of the population.
- Invest public relations efforts in informing particularly the younger (18—25 years old) and Hispanic population about the affordability of and possibilities for financing a community college education.
- Aim information about certain aspects of the Community College particularly at females in order to increase their awareness.
- Expend some effort in marketing adult basic education and evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes to the senior (60 years old and older) segment of the population.

A recommendation for further study is to conduct a follow-up study in the focus group format to further probe some of the perceptions discovered in this survey. It is also recommended that another community survey be conducted in two years in order to continue to collect data so that trends and effects of innovations can be assessed as they relate to the community's attitude toward their Community College.

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A SURVEY OF THE COMMUNITY'S INFORMATION AND ATTITUDES ABOUT DOÑA ANA BRANCH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Background of the Project

The Community College's Assessment Plan states that our assessment "involves a systematic evaluation of how well Doña Ana Branch Community College meets the needs of our constituents and the local community through providing education and training" (Assessment Plan, 1992, pp. 1-2). Knowledge of the information, perceptions and attitudes of people in the Community College's service area is necessary as a context into which the mission, activities and outcomes of DABCC can be placed.

Several indicators in the outcomes assessment matrix can be measured by a survey of the community. The areas of interest include

- barriers to student access
- the Community College's reputation and visibility
- awareness of programs, courses, and delivery formats
- perceptions of the quality of instruction
- understanding and support of the college

The community's perception of its Community College has been of persistent interest to the DABCC staff since the College's establishment in the 1970s. Many people have assumed that the position of our institution as an occupational branch of New Mexico State University, located in the same city as the main campus, has adversely affected the local community's awareness of DABCC. Moreover, the restriction of our course offerings to occupational education and developmental education (rather than general education and transfer courses) and the inability of students to apply their occupational education credits toward a bachelor's degree at NMSU have led to people's misunderstanding of our mission and purposes. A further assumption is that a low level of community awareness and understanding has made difficult the efforts to support the institution through passage of an operational mill levy in 1987 and to build new facilities through passage of a capital bond issue in 1990. Therefore, elevating the community's information, perceptions and attitudes about DABCC is important to the advancement of our mission, and data about the levels of awareness and support are useful in addressing those aspects of the problem where improvement is indicated.

Purpose of the Project

The DABCC Assessment Committee undertook as its first research project the study of the critical success factor, post-program satisfaction and success. The indicator of this critical success factor that can be measured by a community survey is: *Does the community perceive a high quality of instruction?* Measurement of other indicators in the Outcomes Assessment Matrix was also included in the survey instrument.

The community survey was also designed to provide trend data tracking the community's attitudes toward DABCC. One previous community survey, a telephone survey conducted in the spring of 1990, is extant in the files of the DABCC Institutional Research office (Jones, 1990). In that survey, a random sample of 415 adult residents was called "to determine how familiar residents of the county were with DABCC, and if they were familiar with the branch, what their perceptions were in regards to services available and the quality of those services" (Jones, 1990, p. 1).

The following is a summary of the 1990 community survey results:

From the data it seems that about 78% of the adult residents of Doña Ana County are familiar with DABCC and of that group about 17% have taken at least one course at some time. Of the respondents who had taken classes, 86% felt the quality of instruction was good or excellent. Of those answering the question, 84% felt DABCC has a good reputation, and only 1% felt it wasn't good. 90% of the respondents to the question consider DABCC an asset to the community. When asked if they were aware of the different types of classes offered at DABCC, the section with highest recognition was for job training purposes with 86% answering yes, and the section with least recognition was for citizenship classes with 51% answering yes. Other sections had positive responses ranging from 67% to 75%. (Jones, 1990, p. 1)

Methodology

Survey Instrument

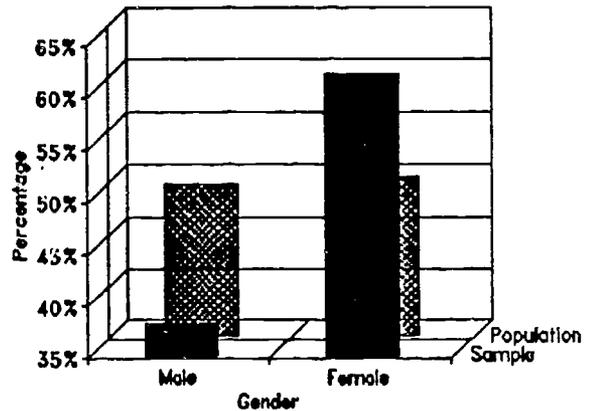
The survey instrument was modeled on the 1990 instrument in order to provide continuity in data collection. Items were checked against indicators in the Outcomes Assessment matrix to ensure that the appropriate indicators were also addressed. The instrument was piloted in telephone interviews with 11 people,

and the wording of some questions was modified slightly. The instrument is in the Appendix.

Sample Selection

The *Las Cruces Metropolitan Telephone Directory* containing listings for all communities in Doña Ana County was used. Random numbers were generated to select a page in the directory and to select a column on that page. The interviewer then called the first residential number in that column, continuing down the column until a respondent answered the phone. Thus, numbers that were businesses, that were busy, for which there was no answer, or that were answered by a recorded message were not included in the survey. One hundred sixty-seven (167) calls were completed with useable responses to at least some of the survey questions.

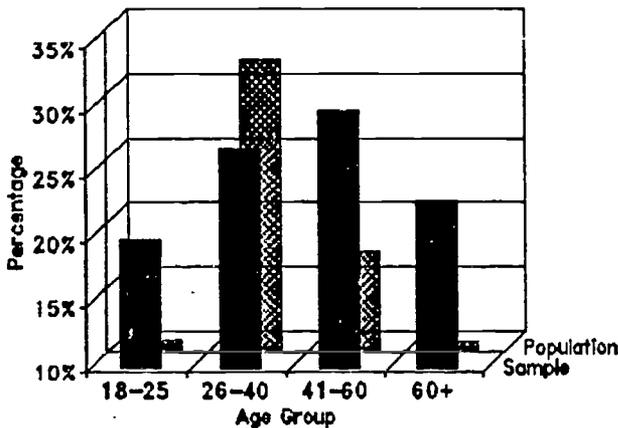
Figure 1 Gender of County Population and Survey Sample



Procedure

The survey was administered by two DABCC staff members, the Associate Provost's Secretary and the Records Specialist. All calls were made between 6:30 and 9:00 p.m. on weekday evenings during June and July, 1992. If a respondent spoke only Spanish, the call was transferred to the Records Specialist, who is bilingual. Each call took less than five minutes to complete.

Figure 2 Age Range of County Population and Survey Sample



Analysis of Results

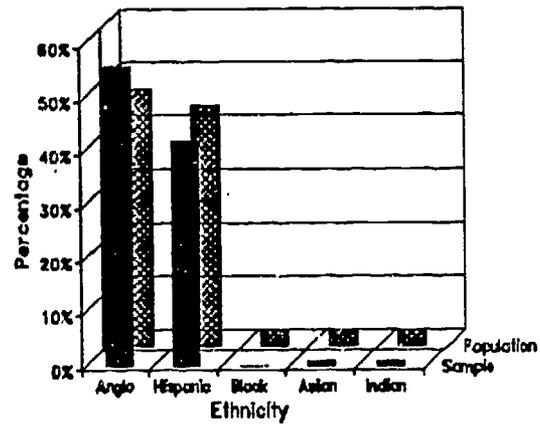
Analysis of Sample

Graphs comparing the make-up of the survey sample to the reference population are presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Eighty-seven percent of the responders resided within the greater Las Cruces area. The remainder were county residents outside of Las Cruces and surrounding villages.

Community Awareness and Satisfaction Figure 3

Ethnicity of County Population and Survey Sample

Table 1 displays the frequency of responses to the *awareness questions* in the community survey. The level of awareness for the Community College as a whole is 88 percent. The level varies among other aspects of DABCC, the highest level of awareness (81 percent) is of occupational training courses, the lowest level (58 percent) is of student support services. About three-fourths of the respondents are aware of these aspects: developmental studies, community education, adult basic education, financial aid availability.



About two-thirds are aware of evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes. When asked if the Community College was an asset to the community and if continuing to offer the various programs was important, the respondents replied overwhelmingly positively.

Table 1. Degree of Awareness of the Community College and Its Programs

| | Yes | Think It Is Important |
|---|-----|-----------------------|
| Had you heard about Doña Ana Branch Community College before this phone call? | 88% | 97% |
| Are you aware that we offer job training in health, business, and technology; for example, paramedic, welding computers? | 81% | 100% |
| Are you aware that we offer refresher (developmental) courses in academic skills—meth, writing, and reading? | 71% | 100% |
| Are you aware that we offer self-improvement and leisure-time courses in areas such as cooking, languages, and exercise? | 75% | 75% |
| Are you aware that we offer adult basic education courses to help obtain a high school diploma, become a U.S. citizen, learn English, or learn to read and write? | 76% | 100% |
| Are you aware that you may enroll for night classes, weekend classes, classes at Gadsden Education Center, and classes at White Sands Missile Range Education Center? | 66% | Not Surveyed |
| Are you aware that we have available financial aid (loans and grants), and scholarships? | 77% | Not Surveyed |
| Are you aware that we offer free tutoring, counseling, skills testing, career guidance, and also, special services for students with disabilities? | 58% | Not Surveyed |

In awareness of several aspects of the Community College, males were found to be significantly more aware than females. See Table 2. The aspects in

which significant differences were found were adult basic education, evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes, financial aid, and student support services.

Table 2. Differences in Awareness by Gender

| | Male | Females | X ² | Probability |
|--|--------|---------|----------------|-------------|
| Awareness of adult basic education | 84.91% | 69.41% | 4.22 | 0.04 |
| Awareness of evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes | 84.62% | 53.57% | 13.68 | 0.00 |
| Awareness of financial aid | 86.79% | 69.41% | 5.42 | 0.02 |
| Awareness of student support services | 67.92% | 51.19% | 3.73 | 0.05 |

The 60-years and older age group was significantly less aware than other age groups of adult basic education, and evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes. The youngest age group surveyed was more aware than others of evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campuses. The 26—40 years old age group was most aware of adult basic education. See Table 3.

Table 3. Differences in Awareness by Age Group

| | 18—25 | 26—40 | 41—60 | 60+ | X ² | Probability |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|-------------|
| Awareness of adult basic education | 80.65% | 87.5% | 69.05% | 64.29% | 6.465 | 0.091 |
| Awareness of evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes | 77.14% | 60.53% | 71.43% | 48.15% | 6.586 | 0.086 |

Use of Community College Services

Two questions related to use of the Community College's services. About one-third (31 percent) of the respondents or their relatives had taken courses at DABCC. Of these, 96 percent describe the quality of the instruction received as *excellent or good*.

Attitudes about DABCC:

Another group of questions inquired into attitudes of community residents toward DABCC. In response to the question, *How would you rate the general reputation of the Community College?*, 96 percent of the responses are *excellent or good*. The question, *Do you think the Community College is an asset (valuable)*

to the Community? elicited a 97 percent yes response, a 1.4 percent *no* response, and a 1.4 percent *no opinion* response.

Significantly more senior citizens (those 60 years and older) than other age groups believed that continuing to offer community education courses was important. See Table 4.

Table 4. Differences in Rank of Importance of Community Education by Age Group

| | 18-25 | 26-40 | 41-60 | 60+ | X ² | Probability |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|-------------|
| Sum of importance of community education ranking | 51.72 | 57.89 | 68.42 | 88.00 | 11.306 | 0.079 |

Perceived Barriers to Access

A survey question asked the respondents to state the considerations that would keep them from taking classes at the Community College. Table 2 displays the percentage of the respondents who selected each item. Lack of time appeared to be the impediment for respondents, with money consideration also appearing to be important.

Table 5. Barriers to Taking DABCC Classes

| Impeding Factor | Percent |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Type of classes offered | 6% |
| Lack of time | 43% |
| Money consideration | 13% |

| Impeding Factor | Percent |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Transportation difficulties | 4% |
| Dependent care responsibilities | 6% |
| Other | 6% |

Some relationships were discovered between impediments to taking classes and gender, ethnicity, or age of the respondents. See Tables 6, 7, and 8. Lack of time was the biggest impediment for the 26-40 years old age group; lack of money for the 18-25 years old age group. Females cited transportation and dependent care as impediments at significantly higher rates than males. Hispanics indicated money as a consideration more often than Anglos. A two-way analysis of variance revealed no interactions between ethnicity and gender in impediments to taking DABCC classes.

Table 6. Differences in Barriers to Taking DABCC Classes by Gender

| | Male | Females | X ² | Probability |
|---------------------------------|------|---------|----------------|-------------|
| Transportation difficulties | 0 | 5.81 | 3.196 | 0.074 |
| Dependent care responsibilities | 0 | 10.47 | 5.931 | 0.015 |

Table 7. Differences in Barriers to Taking DABCC Classes by Ethnicity

| | Anglo | Hispanic | X ² | Probability |
|---------------------|-------|----------|----------------|-------------|
| Money consideration | 9.21% | 22.22% | 4.283 | 0.038 |

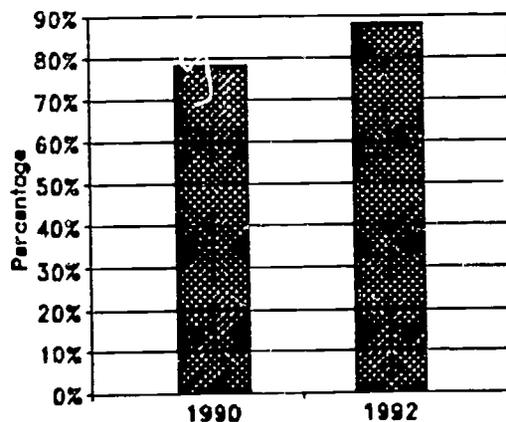
Table 8. Differences in Barriers to Taking DABCC Classes by Age Group

| | 18-25 | 26-40 | 41-60 | 60+ | X ² | Probability |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|-------------|
| Money consideration | 25.81 | 17.07 | 7.14 | 3.57 | 8.347 | 0.039 |
| Lack of time | 38.71 | 58.54 | 52.38 | 10.71 | 17.691 | 0.001 |

Comparison of 1990 and 1992 Data

In Spring 1990, 78 percent of the people surveyed were familiar with Doña Ana Branch Community College. The percentage of familiarity in the Summer 1992 survey was 88 percent. A chi square analysis of this difference revealed that it was a significant difference the probability of its occurring by chance sampling errors being less than 0.01.

Figure 4 Community Familiarity with DABCC—1990 and 1992



Seventeen percent of the earlier survey respondents had taken at least one course at the Community College; 23 percent of the 1992 respondents had done so. Perceptions of the quality of education received as being excellent or good rose from 86 percent in 1990 to 96 percent in 1992.

In 1990, 84 percent rated the reputation of DABCC as good; in 1992, 86 percent rated it as *excellent* or *good*. The proportion who had no opinion fell from 15 percent in 1990 to 11 percent in 1992. Those who felt that DABCC is

an asset to the community were 90 percent of the sample in 1990, 97 percent of the sample in 1992. These findings are displayed graphically in Figures 4 and 5.

Awareness questions about aspects of the Community College were asked in similar formats in both surveys. The results are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9. Comparison of Degrees of Awareness of the Community College and Its Programs, 1990 and 1992

| | 1990 | 1992 |
|--|---------|------|
| Awareness of Doña Ana Branch Community College | 78% | 88% |
| Awareness of occupational training courses | 86% | 81% |
| Awareness of developmental studies courses | 71% | 74% |
| Awareness of community education courses | 70% | 75% |
| Awareness of adult basic education courses | 51%–75% | 76% |

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

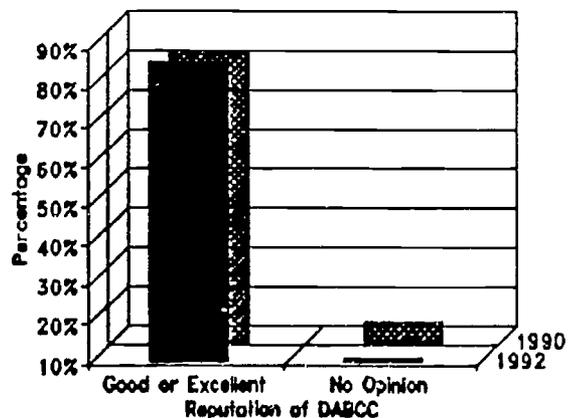
Summary and Conclusions

The 1992 survey shows that the community's awareness of DABCC has increased by 10 percentage points during the past two years. Awareness of particular programs within the Community College, however, has not increased or has dropped slightly. A larger proportion of the 1992 sample than the 1990 sample (23 percent and 17 percent respectively) had taken courses at the Community College, and the perceived quality of education received was higher (96 percent and 86 percent respectively rated instruction received as good or excellent).

The ratings of the Community College and its programs remain high; the results of the survey support a positive response to the assessment question, *Does the community perceive a high quality of instruction?*

It can be concluded that the community is becoming significantly more aware of the Community College and that this awareness carries affirmative tones: those who are aware of DABCC think positively about it. While the percentage of those rating the Community College as good or excellent has not changed significantly from 1990

Figure 5 Reputation of DABCC — 1990 and 1992



to 1992 (84 percent and 86 percent respectively), those who had no opinion dropped from 15 percent to 11 percent.

Information was gathered through the survey on the perceived barriers to taking classes at DABCC that can be used to conduct marketing efforts. *Lack of time* was the barrier mentioned most often by respondents. *Money considerations* were also a perceived barrier, especially for younger people. While *transportation* and *dependent care* were not cited as impediments by a large number of people, it is interesting to note that female respondents mentioned these barriers more often than males.

Recommendations for Action

The following recommendations are made in response to findings of the 1992 community survey.

- Improve awareness of the Community College by increasing awareness of occupational education credit programs, student support services, and evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes.

An 88 percent recognition (*Have you heard about Doña Ana Branch Community College before this phone call?*) rate, while significantly above that of two years ago, is still amenable to improvement. The analysis of the survey results suggests that improving recognition might be developed by improving awareness of various aspects of the Community College. Awareness of job training (occupational education credit programs) was 81 percent. Since this is a primary mission of DABCC, efforts should be expended to increase this percentage. A 58 percent awareness of student support services (tutoring, counseling, etc.), and a 66 percent awareness of evening, weekend and off-campus courses were the lowest levels of awareness measured. These aspects of the Community College, however, are among those which distinguish it from the university. Increasing awareness in these areas should lead to an increased positive recognition of the institution as a whole.

- Offer courses in a short or modular format at convenient times and locations and target market them to the 26–40 year old segment of the population.

The survey results also suggest that target marketing of specific aspects of the Community College to specific population segments is indicated. Those in the 26–40 year old age group noted that lack of time is a barrier to taking classes. Awareness of weekend and evening scheduling and off-site class locations is only 66 percent. These two findings indicate that offering courses in a short or modular format at convenient times and locations and target marketing them to this population segment is a possible course of action.

- **Invest public relations efforts in informing particularly the younger (18–25 years old) and Hispanic population about the affordability of and possibilities for financing a community college education.**

The finding that the younger population and the Hispanic ethnic group consider money a barrier to their taking courses, when coupled with the survey result that only 77 percent of the sample are aware of financial aid available at DABCC, indicates that efforts might profitably be invested in informing this population segment about the affordability of and possibilities for financing a community college education.

- **Aim information about certain aspects of the Community College particularly at females in order to increase their awareness.**

As Table 2 indicated, females are significantly *less* aware than males of the following aspects of DABCC: adult basic education, evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes, availability of financial aid, and student support services. Information efforts aimed at women should reap results both in their awareness and in their participation in the Community College.

- **Expend some effort in marketing adult basic education and evening and weekend scheduling and satellite campus classes to the senior (60 years old and older) segment of the population.**

The survey showed that this age group has less awareness of these aspects of the Community College than other age groups.

Recommendations for Further Study

As with any survey, many questions remain to be answered. It is recommended that this survey be followed up by focus group research. As Topor (1992) states, "Focus groups research can be used to 'sift out' answers when you have conflicting or unclear information. You can find out what's 'behind' decisions; what rationales were used to arrive at decisions or positions" (p. 7). Focus groups can also be used "to acquire general information about your school or your competitors" (p. 10).

It is also recommended that a community survey be conducted every two years in order to acquire trend data about attitudes, support, and access of the service population. With baseline data, it will be possible thus to assess the impact of various actions on the community's attitude toward their Community College.

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Assessment Plan. (1992, June 10). Doña Ana Branch Community College.

Jones, R.L. (1990, August 30). DABCC Telephone Survey Results.

Topor, R.S. (1992). **The complete guide to focus group marketing research for higher education.** Dexter, MI: Thompson-Shore, Inc.

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF THE DABCC SERVICE AREA COMMUNITY

Hello. I am _____ with Doña Ana Branch Community College. We are surveying people in Doña Ana County to find out how much the community knows about us and the kind of education we offer. If you have about five minutes now, I would like to ask you a few questions. Your phone number has been randomly selected, so we can get a cross-section response to our survey. Ready?

- | | | | |
|-----|---|--|----|
| 1. | Had you heard about Doña Ana Branch Community College before this phone call? | yes | no |
| 2. | Have you taken any courses at the community college? (If not, has a relative or someone you know?) | yes | no |
| 3. | How would you describe the quality of the instruction you (or they) received? | excellent good fair poor no opinion | |
| 4. | How would you rate the general reputation of the Community College? | excellent good fair poor no opinion | |
| 5. | Do you think the Community College is an asset (valuable) to the community? | yes no opinion | no |
| 6. | Are you aware that we offer job training in health, business, and technology; for example, paramedic, welding, computers? | yes | no |
| 7. | How important do you think it is that the Community College continue to provide job training courses? | very important somewhat important not very important not important at all | |
| 8. | Are you aware that we offer refresher (developmental) courses in academic skills—math, writing, and reading? | yes | no |
| 9. | How important do you think it is that the Community College continue to provide refresher courses in academic skills? | very important somewhat important not very important not important at all | |
| 10. | Are you aware that we offer self-improvement and leisure-time courses in areas such as cooking, languages, and exercise? | yes | no |

Appendix 1

11. How important do you think it is that the Community College continue to offer self-improvement and leisure-time courses? very important
somewhat important
not very important
not important at all
12. Are you aware that we offer adult basic education courses to help obtain a high school diploma, become a U.S. citizen, learn English, or learn to read and write? yes no
13. How important do you think it is that the Community College continue to offer adult basic education courses? very important
somewhat important
not very important
not important at all
14. Are you aware that you may enroll for: night classes, weekend classes, classes at Gadsden Education Center, and classes at White Sands Missile Range Education Center? yes no
15. Are you aware that we have available financial aid (Loans and Grants), and scholarships? yes no
16. Are you aware that we offer free tutoring, counseling, skills testing, career guidance, and also, special services for students with disabilities. yes no
17. Which of the following would keep you from taking classes?

type of classes offered
lack of time
money consideration

transportation difficulties
dependent care responsibilities
other:

18. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your impressions of the Community College?

I need to ask you the following questions so we can analyze the results of this survey.

Gender
[Guess; don't ask.]

Age Group

What ethnic group/race do you consider yourself a part of?

Male
Female

18-25
26-40
41-60
60+

Caucasian/White/Anglo
Hispanic/Mexican American
Black
Oriental/Asian
American Indian

What is your zip code? _____

Appendix 2

This part of the survey will be detached from the rest to protect the confidentiality of your previous answers.

May we put you on our mailing list and send you information concerning
Doña Ana Branch Community College?

yes

no

Do you want information on any of our programs in particular?

Name _____

Address _____

Thank you for sharing your opinions with us. Goodbye.